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The Test Ban Debate

What impact the partial test-ban treaty will have on this nation's military security has emerged as a key issue in the current Senate hearings. Speaking against ratification, Dr. Edward Teller has argued that technical and military considerations exist which suggest the treaty would have "grave consequences for the security of the United States."

A formidable array of military and civilian witnesses has expressed a contrary view. Defense Secretary McNamara has painted an imposing picture of American nuclear strength and overall superiority, and has contended that the pact will "prolong the duration of our technological superiority."

As spokesman for the unamimous view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor has asserted that though the treaty has some military disadvantages, it is "compatible with the security interests of the nation." And Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, has informed the nation that Dr. Teller's objections have been examined repeatedly and "the points he made are not important enough to forego the treaty."

Dr. Teller believes that the Soviet Union can and will violate the treaty, that the violations will go undetected, and that Russia may gain major military advantages as a result. He apparently puts little confidence in the extensive policing efforts this country now conducts and which it plans to expand. Despite the distinguished contribution Dr. Teller has made to our nuclear preparedness, his arguments must be weighed against the forceful ones Secretary McNamara presented in support of his contention that the Soviet Union could obtain no major results by testing in the atmosphere, underwater, or in outer space without high risk of detection and identification. His arguments draw added impressiveness from the endorsement they have received from the Joint Chiefs and the A.E.C.

Absent from Dr. Teller's case is any consideration of the political factors that put strong pressure on Moscow to live up to the pact's requirements. Premier Khrushchev has agreed to the test ban, not out of benevolence, but because he has compelling reasons to believe it will serve the self interest of the Soviet Union. In the light of its strained relations with Communist China, Moscow has at least as much motive as we to fear the proliferation of nuclear weapons among other nations. International observance of the test-ban treaty is one road to reducing the danger of such proliferation. By coincidence, the Chinese Communists have now given us evidence to specific Soviet action four years ago to retard Peking's acquisition of atomic armaments.

Risks are inescapable in today's troubled world, but the risks inherent in rejecting the treaty and thus giving a new spur to the worldwide nuclear arms race and to pollution of the atmosphere are much greater than any discernible in the pact's approval.